Media Traps and Pitfalls - Avoiding Common Mistakes

Jim Vance
FBI Academy



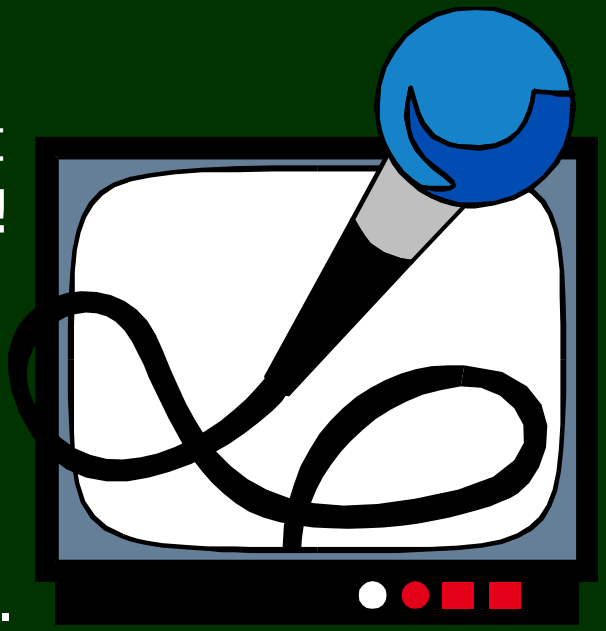
Distractions



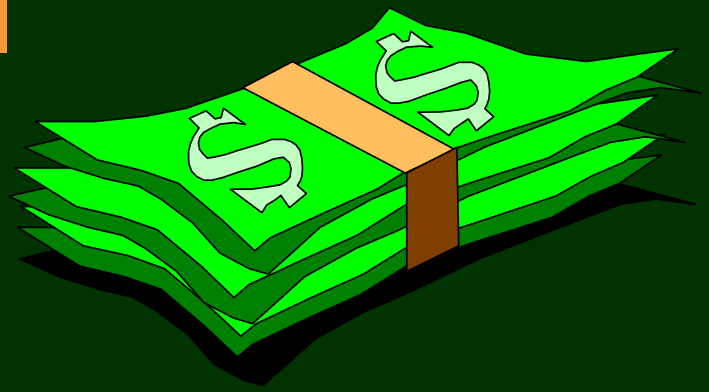
- Focus on interview & ignore background
- Maintain direct eye contact with interviewer.
- Don’t look at camera unless told to (remote)..

Live Mics and Dead Air

- Dead air = A long pause usually after a tough question - don't feel compelled to talk!
- Assume mics & cameras are ***always*** on.
- Insert your own messages into the lull.



The Million Dollar Word



- Clarify ANY word or phrase you don’t understand *before* answering.
- Better to admit up front you don’t understand than be embarrassed later.

Test Questions

- Reporter will “test” you with questions he already knows the answers to.
- Coordinate before answering.



Hypothetical Questions



- Word “If” should sound an alarm
- Address specifics, avoid speculation
- Force reporter to redefine question
- Good question on which to bridge to a message

False Information Questions (Also Called "Mystery Source"

- Has emotional, misleading comments or erroneous quotes/ material
- Do not respond to alleged comments of others
- Do not repeat loaded words



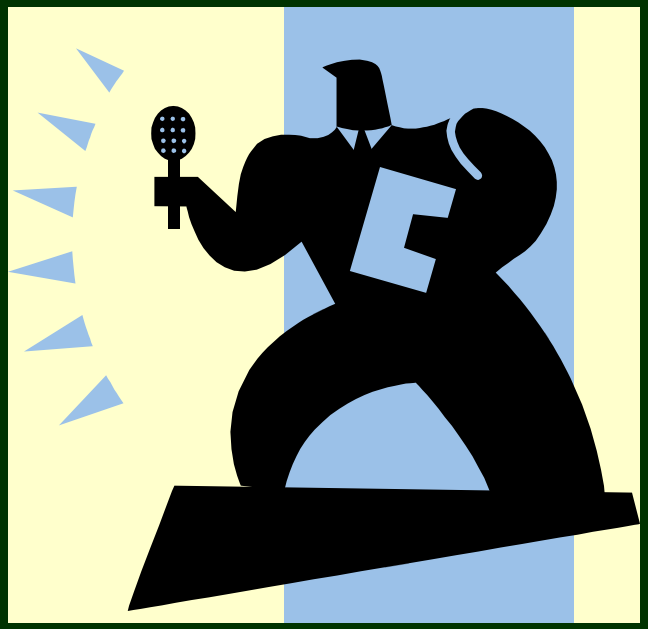
Reinterpretation Questions



- Rephrasing an earlier comment in a way that changes meaning
- Repeat original statement and note difference

"You said earlier that you do not believe in c
input for the police department. Can you te

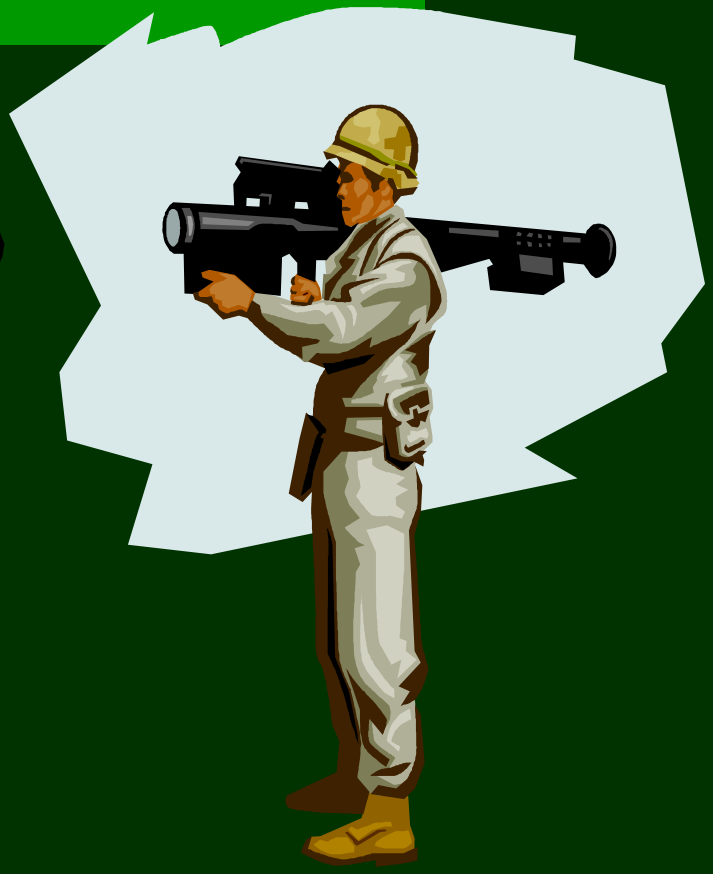
Unreleasable Information Questions



- Deals with things you can't talk about like ongoing investigations, etc
- Often asserts "public's right to know"
- Generally, agree with premise but use "I can't tell you because…"

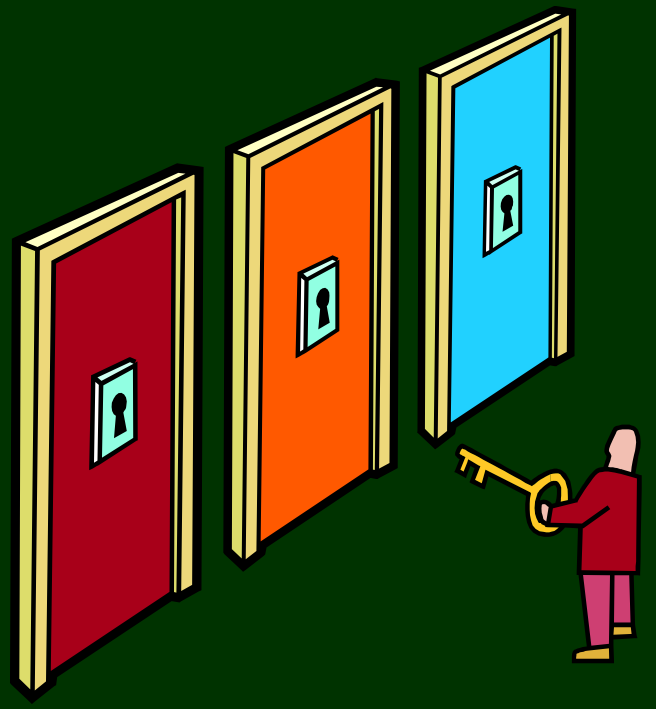
Wake Up Or I'll Shoot This Dog!





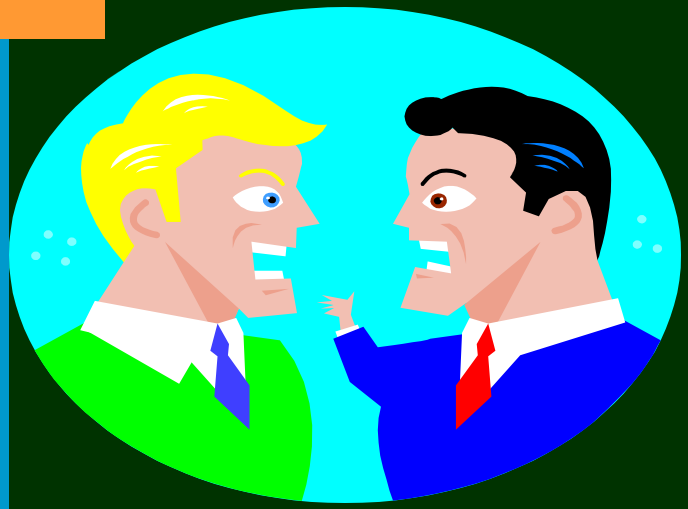
Forced Choice Questions

- Gives you only two options or telegraphs desired response
- Do *not* choose any option if they are even partially incorrect



"Do you think it's better for police to have da
pursuits or just let the criminals go free?"

Handling Interruptions



- Make sure *you* are being concise, direct, and clear
- Don’t get angry
- Remind the reporter that their audience might want a more complete answer.
- End interview?

Multi-Part Questions

- If you can consolidate them, do so
- If too complicated, tell the reporter you will address the most important question as you see it.
- Ask for restatement if required

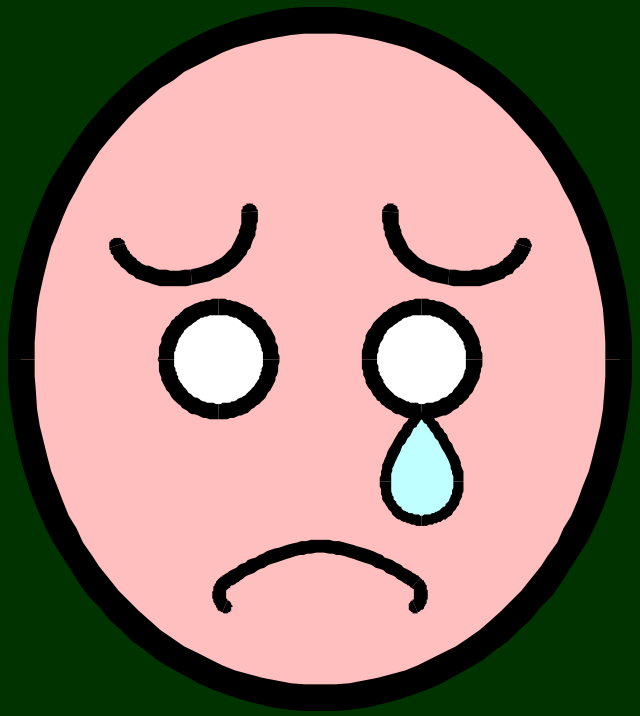


Needling or Hostile Questions

- Reporter trying to goad you into un-professional or unguarded response
- Learn difference between “anger” & righteous indignation



“Feelings” or Emotion Questions

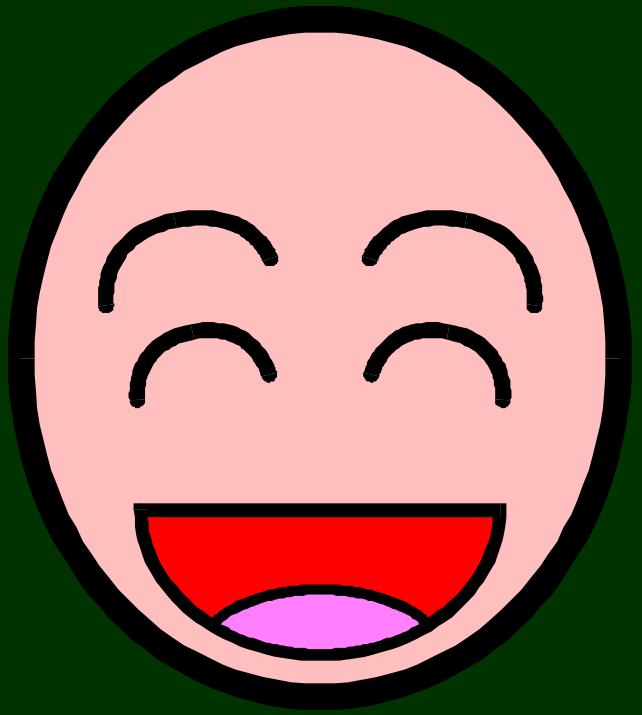


- Expect these and prepare
- Though often avoided, a good balance between emotion and leadership will help to humanize both you and your agency

“How did you feel when you saw those dead children?”

Use of Humor in Answering Questions

- Can be a good way to diffuse or can wipe out every positive statement made
- If used, use wisely
- Self-deprecation is best



"When in doubt, leave it out!"

The Rambling Reporter



- Reporter gets “sidetracked” and brings up new issues.
- Remind reporter of pre-interview agreement.
- Bring interview back to your message.
- Cut this interview short